

# Lights and Shadows

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## Dreamer

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# Dreamer

Richard Freeman  
Short Story

"Snails must lead the most boring lives of any other animals around," thought John as he oozed slowly over a fallen twig, "creeping about searching for food while trying to avoid being squashed or eaten by some bigger animal. Well, if I have to be a snail at least I'm a good looking snail and the only one like myself I've ever seen. After all, most snails are stuck with muddy brown shells, or worse black ones. A light tan shell with chocolate brown stripes—I must have done something right to merit this."

John continued across the twig wrapped deep in thought so when midday came he was surprised to find himself on a large gray stone. "That tree must have fallen across this mountain. No wonder it took so long to cross it—I was climbing uphill! Well, since it's lunch time and I'm hungry, I guess I'll check the base of this mountain for some tasty moss." As his "mountain" was the non-rolling kind, John found just what he wanted. He gorged himself on the moss just as fast as he could scrape it off the rock with his rasp-like tongue.

John was so engrossed in his eating that he didn't notice the approach of a small woods turtle as it crept slowly through the underbrush. When he did notice, it was too late to hide and all he could do was stare at it.

"Well, John, you really did it this time—you must be getting old to let a giant monster like that sneak up on you. Just look at it, have you ever seen anything uglier in all your life? Those beady red eyes, the drooling beak of a mouth, the putrid green head all crackled with yellow stripes."

"Your only chance now is to stare him down," thought John. As he raised himself up to his non-impressive full height and extended his eye stalks, the turtle lunged at John. But just before the turtle's jaws closed on him, John flapped his wings and took off into the air.

"Wait a minute," thought John, "snails don't have wings!" At this point John under went a momentary disorientation and then woke up.

"Anything wrong, John?" asked Holly.

"Just a nightmare. I dreamed I was a snail and only escaped death at the last minute when I remembered my wings."

"Now I've heard it all—a butterfly that dreamed he was a snail. I told you to stay away from that honeysuckle nectar; it'll give you bad dreams every time"

John just sat there fanning his wings, trying to wake up and thought about his dream. He remembered what it felt like to slither slowly about with a shell, even a pretty one, and mused on how much better to be a butterfly.

"Well," thought John, "at least I don't have to worry about turtles." With that he spread his autumn-colored wings and took to the air.

"This is the life," mused John as he drifted about on the wind currents of the warm, sunny morning. "Flying about looking for flowers while the whole world is spread out below, a miniature of its true giant self."

His thoughts were disturbed by the flutter of heavier wings and he noticed a large red cardinal diving towards him. "Maybe the dream was a premonition, for all the good it does me now. I really ought to learn to pay more attention to my surroundings." As the bird swooped closer it became obvious that the butterfly couldn't escape. John struck out with his fangs and caught the cardinal in the throat, killing it instantly, however momentum pulled the body out of John's mouth and sent it plummeting towards the earth. John was thrown for a loop but soon recoiled himself and began to take note of the situation.

"Oh, that's right, I'm really a snake. Fancy big old me being scared of a runt like him." It was at this point that John realized he was about fifty feet above the ground and no longer able to fly. A short scream came from his mouth as his body followed that of the bird's. At the moment of impact John woke with a start and frightened off a gray field mouse that hadn't seen the sleeping snake before.

"Darn it, that crazy dream cost me an easy meal." John was a bit sluggish since he had been lying in the shade so he slithered off into the hot desert to warm himself and shake the sleep from his coils.

John moved on across the sand without any real purpose other than staying unnaturally aware of his surroundings. So when he came to the long black rock, he was ready to take a rest break. "I really like it up here— it's so nice and warm, and I can see all around without tiring my neck."

Such were John's thoughts as he lay upon the asphalt watching out over the desert. He managed to see the car coming before the driver saw him, however the speed of the car was such that even with his warning, John couldn't get out of the way in time. As the car bore down upon him, John was racking his brain for some way out when he remembered his legs and leaped from the roadway.

"Silly me, thinking I was a snake," thought John as he woke beside the road. He picked himself up and began thumbing for a ride.

"That sun'll play tricks with your mind if you let it."

A few minutes later a black pickup stopped and the old man inside asked "Need a ride?"

"Yeah, but in the other direction."

"Sorry."

"Thanks any way," replied John, courteously tipping his hat. The old man stared at John's head for a few seconds and then took off as fast as his truck would go.

"I wonder what got into him?" mused John as he scratched the base of his antenna and then John woke up. □